

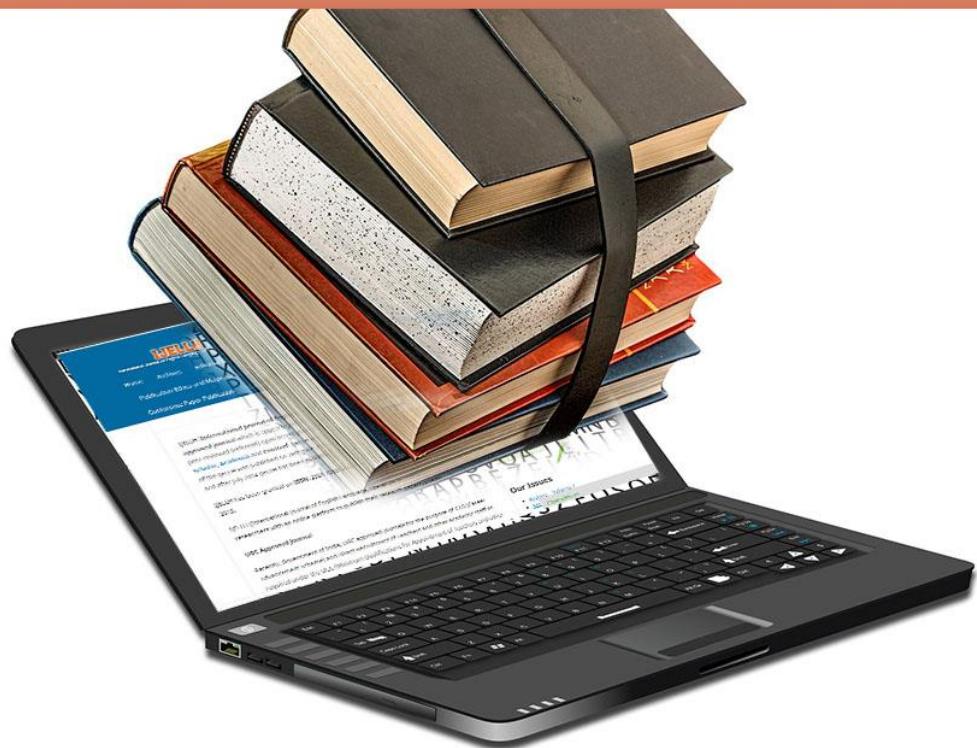
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Interior Monologue as a Narrative Mode of Revelation of Characters: A Critique of Anita

Desai's Select Novels.

Abstract

The present research is entitled “Interior Monologue as a Narrative Mode of Revelation of characters: A Critique of Anita Desai’s Select Novels.” The purpose of the research is to evaluate how Anita Desai does exploit interior monologue in her delineation of characters. The literary genre interior monologue is the off-shoot of Stream of Consciousness. The technique interior monologue is taken as an approach for the analysis of the study. This study examines Desai novels *Voice in the City*, *Where Shall We Go This Summer? Cry, The Peacock*. It is a study of Anita Desai characters. (Keywords: Stream of Consciousness, Interior monologue, Narrative Mode, Monologue, Primitive reality).

Introduction

This research paper is entitled “Interior Monologue as a Narrative Mode of Revelation of characters: A Critique of Anita Desai’s Select Novels.” It examines psychological insight of Desai’s characters. The genre “Stream of Consciousness” is taken as a literary approach to this research. The interior monologue is used as a technique in this research. This research explores the Women Characters in particular and major and minor characters in general. This study deals with *Voices in the City*, *Where Shall We Go This Summer*, and *Cry, The Peacock*.

Approaches of the Study

The interior monologue highlighting the stream of consciousness of characters reveals not only the inscape of individual characters but in the process there is an attempt to capture Universal themes of eternal significance. Anita Desai’s “central theme is the existential predicament of an individual, which is projected through incompatible couples- acutely sensitive wife’s and dismal, callous, inconsiderable, ill-chosen husbands” (Shyam M. snani, “Desai’s theory and practice of the Novel”, *Perspectives on Anita Desai* 5). Desai’s haracters make attempts to realize the nature of reality and life. For instance, Monisha’s cravings depict this eagerness, though with no result: “Is this what life is then, my life? Only a conundrum- is that, then life?” (*Voices in the City*, 125).Maini comments on the existential predicament of Desai’s characters: “where as the childless Maya’s angst is existential and metaphysical, Sita’ s ache is essentially domestic and temporal, though there are moments of pure terror and void even in her life, giving her state an existential dimension .” (D.S. Maini, “The Achievement of Anita Desai”, 227).

The Revelation of the Characters through Interior Monologue

The existential paradoxes of illusion and reality, death and life find expression in Desai’s novels. The Western critic Tripathi probes into the paradox of illusion and reality with reference to Sita’s character: “illusion cannot be embraced forever; reality is to be

accepted. There is no moral escape possible except in a dreamland where it can operate only on the mental level and never in actual life. Life is to be faced courageously and with balance and practically. Sita is existential jargon of tedium, boredom, nostalgia, disgust. seem to be thrown as sop of the western mind". (J.P. Tripathi, *The Mind and art of Anita Desai*, 78-79). Sita is convinced at the end of the novel that, she has to compromise with reality. Escaping into illusion will not solve the problem of life. When Srivastava asked about Sita's final choice, Anita Desai justified it thus:

Srivastava

Sita's revulsion with the island Should not mean, I hope, retreating to the routine-ridden world. She made an existential choice: couldn't she have lived there forever? Desai: The book was not written as a fable. Because it was rooted in reality as all friction must be to some extent, I could not have given it an ending That belonged to the world of the fable.(Ramesh. K. Srivastava, *Perspectives on Anita Desai*, 222).

The novel dramatises a powerful struggle life denying Maya and life- affirming Sita impulses with a view to achieve harmony in life. Sita, inspite of predictable two positions, realizes that her assertion of the everlasting "No" has no validity: "She had escaped from duties and responsibilities from order and routine, from life and the city to the unliveable island. She had refused to give birth to a child in a world not fit to receive the child. She had the imagination to offer it an alternative life unlivéd, a life bewitched. She had cried out her great 'No' but now the time had come for her epitaph to be written" (*Where Shall We Go This Summer?* , p. 101).

Sita becomes aware at the end that one cannot escape: "perhaps I never ran away at all. Perhaps I am only like the jelly fish washed up by the waves, stranded there on the sandbar. I was just stranded here by the sea, that is all. I hadn't much to do with it all " (*Where*

Shall We Go This Summer?, 90). The protagonists in *Voices in the City* are suggested a practical solution for their existential problems of life and death. Jit Nair, a minor character speaks to Amla: :I think you all involve yourselves in tragedies of your own making. I think you all drive yourselves deliberately into that dead and where you imagine you will find some divine solution. But there is none, not in lifetime, all of us discover that, and we force ourselves to turn and take another road" (182).

The process of moving from negation to affirmation is indeed strenuous. Sita in her ambivalent situation is unable to decide "which half of her life was real and which unreal". She experienced that "primitive reality" on the island. Monisha is unable to move away from her world of negation to that of affirmation. She envisages a clean, husked, irreducible life that should follow and finds herself lacking the will to do it:

If I had religious faith, I could easily enough renounce all this. But I have no faith, no alternative to my confused despair, there is nothing I can give myself to and so I must stay.
(*Voices in the City*, 122)

Desai seems to suggest that what Maya and Monisha could not achieve- reaching the stage of affirmation from that of negation that Sita could do. The novel *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* seems to be an epitome of an irresistible yearning for a purposeful life. Sita is keen to invest her life with a meaning. She emphatically observes: "I should have known how to channel my thoughts and feelings, how to put them to use. I should have given my life some shape, then, some meaning. Atleast, it would have had some for me-even if no one else had cared" (86).

The long struggle of Desai's characters to understand the meaning of life and death is powerfully portrayed through their interior monologue. Maya wants to live. But, she is struggling to escape the web of death:

Am I gone insane? Father! brother! husband! who is my saviour? I am in love, and I am dying, God, let me sleep, forget, rest. But no, I'll never sleep again. There is no rest any more- only death and waiting. (Cry, The Peacock, 98)

Desai's heroines have "to choose between death a mean existence, in order to avoid being caught and rebuffed and humiliated repeatedly in the human whirlpool. Maya and Monisha choose the way out in death. Sita, Amla and Nanda Kaul in the novel *Fire on the Mountain* compromise with bitterness while Bim in the novel *Clear Light of Day*. Emerges from the bitterness of compromise into a visionary intuition of the continuity of life" (Shantha Krishnaswamy, *The Woman in Indian fiction in English*. New Delhi: Ashish Publishing House, 1984, 240).

Tripathi epitomizes the philosophical message of life's deeper meaning in Desai's novels:

Novel after novel of Anita Desai presents a study of life and its values, and the characters seem to be delving deeper and deeper in life below its apparent surface for higher meaning. Nirode Ray makes such a search for life's deeper meaning and comes out with a conclusion that one has to work for something higher than happiness and agony to arrive at a state of equanimity which is above pleasure and pain, above passions and nihilism (J.P. Tripathi, *The Mind and Art of Anita Desai*, 39-40).

The merger of death and life in the peacock symbol is described by Rao as "The monsoon maddened peacock is shown dancing madly, crying for its lover, and killing itself in a frenzy of love. But the dance also becomes a way out of the predicament. The dance of death is also the dance of life" (B. Ramachandra Rao, *The Novels of Mrs. Anita Desai: A Study*.17).

The meaning of surrender towards achieving a better life is built into Cry, *The Peacock and Voices in the City*. Nirode finds the key to the mystery of life in Monisha's death:

He felt excited as a religious fanatic is excited by the death or the celebration of the death of a saint. He felt himself elevated to an unmistakeably high vantage point from where he could see the whole fantastic design of life and death, of incarnation followed by reincarnation, of unconsciousness turning into consciousness, of sleep followed by waking. It was a landscape like that of the worlds, the planets, and he was able to see the rising of the sun, followed by the rising of the moon, the dimming and flaring of stars in the firmament, and everything was explained, everything was lucid, reasonable, marvellous. This lucidly made him transparent allowing night and sorrow to merge with his own ecstasy till everything became one, became unified, and understandable". (*Voices in the City*, 249)

Desai's vision of higher life depicted through the speeches of her characters finds interpretation in the light of her views on art. In her interview she expresses this view: "Neither Nirode nor Amla 'escape from their dilemmas', do they? I see art as an exploration, an enquiry, not an escape". (Ramesh K. Srivastava, *Perspectives on Anita Desai*, 222). She explores the significance of artistic message. In her "Replies to the Questionnaire", she clearly distinguishes between art and reality:

Reality is merely one-tenth visible section of the iceberg that one sees above the surface of the ocean-art the remaining nine-tenths of it that lie below the surface. That is why it is more near Truth than Reality itself. Art does not merely reflect Reality-it enlarges it. (Anita Desai, "Replies to the Questionnaire", *Kakatiya Journal of English Studies*, Vol.3, No.1, 1978)

By probing into the inner self of her characters, she goes below the iceberg and analyses the truth. She studies both reality and Truth. The physical world, the external

background forms only the superficial reality. The deeper truth is to be realized in the inner self of the characters. According to Desai, literature endeavour to release the inner consciousness, the truth: "I see them (literature and life) as vertical rather than parallel development; life is reality you see on the surface-the visible word-while literature plunges the depths below that lie hidden and need to be explored and described. Shelley on poets: "They measure the circumference and sound the depths of human nature with a comprehensive and all penetrating spirit" (Ramesh K. Srivastava, Perspectives on Anita Desai, 218).

Rao perceives the need to probe into the human psyche and hence appreciates the contribution of Desai: "the novel is rooted in reality. It generally thrives in a stable society with a dense social structure. It denotes more attention to the unique individual. Refusing to accept the imposing abstractions and idealistic representations of the Epic and the Romance, the novel explores the ordinary and the common- place in all their bewildering complexity. Truthfulness is its slogan, Realism its animating principle" (Ramachandra Rao, *The Novels of Mrs. Anita Desai: A Study*, 4).

Conclusion

This research concludes that, Anita Desai's women characters are tormented with anxiety. In this research Stream of Consciousness and Interior Monologue are used as an approach. Desai's women characters feel in culmination of each novel that, they live life in death and death in life. They think that, "the life is too much with us". The greatest message of Anita Desai's novels is born of her exploration into the human psyche. The truth can be explored only by an artist. The truth, that an artist can explore is the truth about life and death, which is man's perennial problem. Desai by plunging into this

problem has become one of the artists, who render universal and eternal message to the humanity.

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